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HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS

Letter dated 12 July 1993 from the Permanent Representative of Jordan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to send you herewith the statement made by His Royal Highness Crown Prince El-Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan before the Second World Conference on Human Rights at Vienna, on 14 June 1993 (see annex for summary and full text). His Royal Highness addressed the meeting as one of the eight eminent persons invited as personal guests of the Secretary-General to the Conference, as well as on behalf of Jordan.

I should highly appreciate it if you would kindly have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as an official document of the General Assembly, under item 115 of the preliminary list.

(Signed) Adnan S. ABU ODEH
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* A/48/50.

ANNEX

Summary of the statement made by His Royal Highness Crown Prince El-Hassan Bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the World Conference on Human Rights at Vienna, on 14 June 1993

I. Introduction

It is our duty to ensure that this meeting inspires an active commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms. Our political and economic differences have sometimes caused us to find consensus elusive, but the task of consensus-building is critical in these times of transition. As a first step, we must re-confirm two basic principles: the universality of human rights, and the indivisibility of all rights.

II. Universality

Human rights are universal in that they are possessed by all members of the human family; these rights form a core minimum standard binding on all states. However, the values of each society may shape the policies and measures which a states adopts in order to implement its international obligations. Regional human rights instruments can play an important role here by complementing and strengthening global norms.

III. Monitoring

International monitoring of human rights touches on the sensitive issue of state sovereignty. Sovereignty does not give license to brutalise, to disempower, to deny human dignity. The monitoring of human rights should thus be seen to be objective: for selective condemnation serves only to perpetuate conflict; and to hamper potential reconciliation.

IV. Indivisibility

We need to adopt a holistic approach which can embrace the inter-dependence of all human beings and the indivisibility of all rights. This means protecting and respecting not only civil and political rights, but also the economic, social and cultural rights that are their practical foundations. We must commit ourselves to strengthening the implementation of these rights.

V. Conclusion

Public awareness programmes, backed up internationally by the ratification of treaties and the commitment of resources, are desperately needed; but these alone are insufficient. Something more profound is required: a shift in our thinking, so that humanity, rather than economic considerations, can be central to the goals of governments and of individuals. We must move on from the "sound bite" mentality and the slogans of our media age to a global ethic of responsibility and caring - to a new code of human conduct. Let us build here a new vision based on mutual respect, tolerance and compassion, so that the outcome of this Conference will do justice to our common humanity.

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HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS
CROWN PRINCE EL-HASSAN BIN TALAL
OF THE HASHEMITE KINGDOM OF JORDAN

Address to

THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Vienna, Austria
14 June 1993

We have gathered at the World Conference on Human Rights to strengthen our individual and collective efforts to ensure respect for the human rights and dignity of every child, woman and man. In this task we represent those who are not here with us, those millions who are tortured by starvation, or imprisoned behind the bars of prejudice and discrimination, and those facing death, physical abuse or incarceration for their beliefs. We speak here, Ladies and Gentlemen, not only for ourselves, but also for the voiceless still denied their right to self-determination, or those suffering the abuse of prolonged foreign occupation. We seek to act on behalf of the one quarter of our human family forced to live in poverty and deprivation, as well as of the dispossessed and those forced to flee their homelands, seeking refuge and international protection; yet all too often finding asylum a mirage beyond their reach. We speak here also for those yet to come: We are responsible for the future that awaits our children and humanity as a whole. Abuses of human rights offend the dignity not only of the victims, but of us all. We are all members of one family - humanity - sharing our one Earth in common. At great cost we have learned the importance of caring for the Earth. We must also learn to care for those who live upon it.

It is our duty to ensure that this meeting goes beyond mere rhetoric and inspires an active commitment to universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. The differences in our political ideologies and in the economic models we have adopted have sometimes impeded consensus amongst us. But we are not here to talk about politics - we are here to talk about anthro-politics, politics for people - but about rights; not about economic theories, but about justice and equitable access to available resources.

In this, Ladies and Gentlemen, we have the benefit of the diversity of our faiths and cultures which will act as a rich resource in our search for a consensus based on our common humanity. President Mary Robinson of Ireland has recently called for a listening approach to human rights. We must heed her words here in our deliberations and listen to each other and be respectful of each other's points of view, mindful that in our various traditions the approaches we adopt in the process of consensus building might themselves differ.

This task of consensus building is critical. In these transitional post-Cold-War times, we need a joint commitment to meet the challenges of an emerging world order. Human rights represent a touchstone, a yardstick by which the success of our endeavours can be judged. Our aim should not be simply to reach a compromise between differing or conflicting views; but to find a common vision, a framework for global action, a consensus for the future of humankind.

As a first step we need to re-confirm those fundamental principles on which human rights are based - the universality of human rights and the indivisibility of all rights. From this base we can develop a truly global ethic for regulating, not only the relationship between states and their peoples, but also the manner in which individuals and communities treat one another.

A global consensus on human rights must affirm their universality. Human rights are universal in that they are possessed by all members of the human family, regardless of differences of gender, race, religion, politics, or any other distinguishing characteristic. These rights form a core minimum standard binding on all states.

Some recent criticisms of the principle of universality of human rights provided the impetus for a satellite meeting in preparation for this Conference which was held in Jordan in April 1993 under the auspices of the International Movement of Rights and Humanity. This discussion brought together representatives of the world's main faiths, and people from all regions of the world. A consensus emerged from the meeting calling for the re-affirmation of the vital importance of the principle of universality, by which all states must respect and protect the internationally recognised human rights, whatever the level of the states' economic or political development. We should take the opportunity of this World Conference to re-confirm this vital principle.

However, as our brother Assistant Secretary General Ibrahima Fall reminded us in the Amman meeting, international "standards provide great flexibility in national adaptation

and do not impose any specific political, legal, social or cultural model". Thus the values, Ladies and Gentlemen, of each society may shape the policies and measures which a state adopts in order to implement its international obligations.

It is in this context that Jordan envisages regional human rights instruments playing an important role. May I here pay special tribute to the African Charter, which in it carries many precedents. They can complement and strengthen the global norms, by developing additional rules and norms for the implementation of human rights in the region. It is our hope that the World Conference will provide an impetus for the adoption of a regional human rights charter in our part of the world, drawing on the richness of our philosophies and the values of our faiths and cultures. Similarly, the contributions of different approaches may strengthen the drafting of future global instruments.

International monitoring of the established standards touches Ladies and Gentlemen on the sensitive issue of the nature of state sovereignty. But we must never lose sight of the fact that sovereignty does not give licence to brutalise, to disempower, to deny human dignity. There is no sovereign right to torture and maim, or to condemn individuals or whole peoples to poverty through the abuse and manipulation of political or economic power.

Human rights issues are the legitimate concern of the international community under the U.N. Charter. All states therefore have a responsibility - and indeed an interest - to promote universal respect for human rights. But if human rights criteria are to be the foundation of justice in the world, their monitoring should be seen to be objective. Accountability must be based on internationally recognised legal norms, and not on a particular state's subjective value judgement. For selective condemnation serves only to perpetuate conflict and hamper potential reconciliation.

We have a unique opportunity at this Conference to re-confirm the indivisibility of all rights and to commit ourselves to strengthening the implementation not only of civil and political rights but also of economic, social and cultural rights. It was President Leopold Senghor who reminded us that "human rights begin with breakfast", yet starvation is widespread. We are witness to the growing number of our children forced to eke out a precarious existence on city streets; the suffering of people evicted from their homes to swell the homelessness that shames our societies; the indigenous peoples of our world denied their cultural heritage; and the growing impoverishment of women, children and other vulnerable groups. Our indifference and failure to take strong and

effective action to prevent and address these violations, is in my view itself a form of abuse - one for which we all share responsibility.

As far as cultural rights are concerned, I trust that the rich culture of this beautiful city of Vienna, Foreign Minister Mock, host to our Conference, will inspire us to give special emphasis to developing the protection and implementation of these rights, and to strengthen the relationship of cultural rights to human development and democracy. A society which prevents free cultural expression or excludes participation in cultural life by any part of its people is an impoverished society, and one that is unlikely to practice tolerance and other attitudes fundamental to human rights.

Since the 1968 World Conference in Tehran, we have done much to identify the issues of concern. Considerable progress has been made in strengthening the protection of human rights by the adoption of specific international legal instruments. Our task at this Conference is surely to consider how to bridge the divide between the aspirations of these legal texts, and the realities of people's lives. For despite our achievements, many categories of human rights violations have yet to be eliminated.

We need to move on from the mere reiteration of human wrongs to promoting human rights - right relationship between states and their peoples, and mutual respect among individuals. This requires, as some of our colleagues in the N.G.O.s have reminded us, a pro-active approach focused on effective strategies for the prevention of violations, including the promotion of a human rights framework for policy-making, education in human rights and responsibilities, and the empowerment of individuals and peoples so that they live in dignity, protected by their rights.

We need to adopt a holistic approach which can embrace the interdependence of all human beings and the indivisibility of all human rights; and which can address social inequalities and environmental concerns, both national and international, in the idiom of human rights. This means protecting and respecting not only civil and political rights, but also the economic, social and cultural rights that are their practical foundations.

We need more public awareness programmes, backed up at the international level by the ratification of treaties and the commitment of resources. But is this sufficient? It seems that we need something more profound - a shift in our thinking so that humanity, rather than economic considerations, can be central to our goals both as governments and as individuals.

Such an ethic is essential if we wish to deal effectively with the myriad of new challenges facing us. We need think only of the increasingly apparent human dimensions of the environmental crisis; the sore testing of our compassion and humanity by the widening AIDS pandemic; the growing technological and economic divide between North and South; or the difficulties of containing religious intolerance which threatens the mutual understanding so critically needed in our increasingly multi-racial and multi-cultural societies.

The human spirit is under siege, our instinct of neighbourly love threatened by the onslaught of hatred, intolerance, greed and cynicism, and may I add to those in the hall, with all due respect, apathy. The world cries out for inspiration, but is floundering in its search for guidance, for a way forward.

Can human rights values provide that light to guide us? Can the candle of hope rekindle our human solidarity and love? Can we build a truly global ethic of respect for human rights and dignity which shapes not only international action, and that of governments, but also our own actions as individuals? How can we move beyond the paucity of spirit caused by excessive materialism?

In the words of the Arab poet Al-Mutanabi:

> "he who squanders his days collecting money,
> for fear of poverty,
> poverty is what he has attained."

This view has been echoed recently by Nobel Peace Laureate and prisoner of conscience Aung San Suu Kyi who writes "material yardsticks alone cannot serve as an adequate measure of human well-being". She reminds us that "even as basic an issue as poverty has to be re-examined to take into account the psychological sense of deprivation that makes people feel poor". She warns us that a "narrowly focused materialism that seeks to block out all considerations apparently irrelevant to one's own well-being tends finally to block out what is in fact most relevant".

Ladies and Gentlemen, considerations of this sort were behind the shift in U.N.D.P.'s approach from measuring development solely in terms of G.N.P. towards including other criteria to measure not just economic, but human development. We need to move on from the "sound bite" mentality and slogans of our media age to deeper reflection, and replace the "ethic" of success and materialism with an ethic of responsibility and care.

The potential for such a global ethic is inherent in our common humanity and the values shared by our faiths - the avoidance of harm to others, compassion and neighbourly love. Together with the values on which human rights are based - recognition of equal human dignity and worth, mutual respect, tolerance and justice - we have firm foundations for that ethic based on an inclusive approach, one which brings women and men into equal partnership and listens to the voices of the young and others too frequently ignored.

We need a new vision - a vision which is grounded in humility, in modesty, in self-criticism; a vision for a better world based on mutual respect, tolerance, compassion and human solidarity. We need to build a code of human conduct which informs professional inter-personal relationships and calls upon governors and governments alike to place respect for human rights and humanitarian principles at the very centre of their policies and actions.

A strong global ethic to shore up political will is essential to ensure prompt action by the international community in response to murder, rape and other atrocities or ethnic genocide, and to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice. We need, Ladies and Gentlemen, to promote greater international solidarity based on shared humanity acting as a common bond between all peoples.

In promoting such an ethic I have in mind that it is not just governments that have the responsibility to respect human rights and dignity, but individuals as well, whether in political positions, professional life, or acting as private citizens. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reminds us of this common responsibility the words "all human beings ..... should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood".

It is in this spirit that I proposed to the General Assembly over a decade ago the promotion of a "new International Humanitarian Order". Since then, Secretary General, Jordan has supported a number of resolutions in that context, the most recent being resolution 47/106 adopted last December which calls upon the Secretary-General to report on the progress made to the Assembly next year. The end of the Cold War offers an exciting opportunity within the international community to review relationships between peoples and nations, and to identify common ethical values upon which to build our common future.

It is important, Ladies and Gentlemen, that "the New World Order" everybody is now talking about is essentially humanitarian in content and in intent. In the final analysis, it is humanitarian problems, affecting the lives of millions of our fellow human beings, which are the products of violations of human rights as well as the ultimate challenge to supporters of those rights. The growing number of increasingly complex humanitarian issues is a tragic comment on our times. It is therefore not surprising that, during the preparatory meetings prior to this conference, a number of governments highlighted the nexus between human rights and humanitarian issues. It is incumbent upon us, individually and collectively, to build human solidarity in favour of human rights and freedoms.

Recently, Sir Yehudi Menuhin suggested the creation of a "European Parliament of Cultures". Well, how about a Peoples' Parliament - a flexible approach to participation. Certainly something along these lines is needed.

We must support and join in partnership with the N.G.O.s, the individual human rights advocates, and the peoples' movements throughout the world, which nurture and enact this solidarity. It is through these groups that the opening phrase of the U.N. Charter "We the Peoples ....." is given credibility and life.

Let us build, Ladies and Gentlemen, on our common purpose here, so that the final outcome of this Conference will do justice to the humanity which we all share. We can, we must, we will be inspired by this Conference to commit ourselves to building a truly global ethic of respect for human rights and dignity.

Thank you.